

## **PREGNANT PATIENT CONSENT TO TESTING FOR HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV)**

**A**s part of good prenatal care, your health care providers recommend certain blood tests to detect infections and other conditions in pregnancy. If a problem is found, treatment can reduce the risk of harm to you and your baby. However, you can choose to be tested or not.

### ***What are HIV and AIDS?***

HIV is the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS. You can become infected with HIV if the body fluids - like blood or semen - of an infected person enter your body. The virus kills cells of your immune system - your body's natural defense against disease. In most cases, a person who has been infected with HIV doesn't get sick with AIDS right away. The virus breaks down the immune system over time. AIDS occurs when a person develops certain diseases that result from a weakened immune system. Medicines can delay the onset of AIDS after HIV infection.

### ***Why should pregnant women have the HIV test?***

About 2 out of every 1000 pregnant women are infected with HIV. Mothers can pass HIV infection to their babies during pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Breastfeeding is another way a mother with HIV can pass it to her baby. HIV infection during pregnancy causes almost all cases of HIV infection in children.

A woman can help prevent passing HIV to her baby by taking certain medications during pregnancy. For this reason, all women should be tested for HIV during pregnancy so they can be treated if they test positive. Once the baby is born, a woman with HIV can help prevent her baby from being infected with HIV by not breastfeeding.

### ***What is HIV testing?***

Blood tests can show if you have been infected with HIV. There are several types of HIV blood tests. The most common test - called the ELISA - searches for HIV antibodies in your blood. If this test is positive, another test called the Western blot is used to confirm the results. These tests do not tell you if you have AIDS or if you will get sick. They only tell you if you are carrying the virus. When the blood sample is taken, you may have some slight discomfort when the needle punctures the skin and a small bruise may result. Otherwise, there is little or no risk of physical injury.

### ***Your test results.***

If your results are negative, it means the HIV antibodies were not found in your blood. It takes the body some time to make enough antibodies to be detected by the test. If you were infected recently, your test could be negative even if you are infected. For this reason, you may want to take a follow-up test in 6 months to ensure the results remain negative. A woman may need a second test if she is at high risk for infection.

If you test positive for having HIV antibodies, you are infected with the HIV virus. You can pass the infection to your baby and to others, including your sex or needle-sharing partner(s). You will need special health care.

### ***What if I have HIV and I am pregnant?***

You have a number of choices:

- Take special medication for HIV during your pregnancy. This will improve your health and greatly reduce the risk of your baby getting HIV.
- Continue your pregnancy without the medication.
- Choose to end the pregnancy.

### ***What treatment should I expect if I test positive for HIV?***

Pregnant women infected with HIV need to have their health checked closely. If you are HIV positive, you should report all symptoms to your health care provider to ensure that you get proper care. Your health care provider will prescribe medications to help prevent other infections.

Treatment with special medications during pregnancy may help prevent the infection from being passed from the mother to her baby. Without treatment, about 25% of children (1 out of 4) born to women infected with HIV will get the virus. With medication, that number drops to less than 8%, or about 1 out of 12. For some women, cesarean birth may be recommended.

### ***What happens after the baby is born?***

With your permission, right after birth and for the next 6 weeks, the baby will be given special medication for HIV. The baby will be tested for HIV. The baby could get HIV from breast milk so women who are HIV positive should not breastfeed.

### ***Reduce Your Risk***

You can reduce your risk of sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV, if you:

- Know your partner(s). It's not just your own behavior that puts you at risk for infection - - it's your partner(s)' too. Ask about their sexual history and whether they have ever injected drugs. You and your partner may want to be tested before you begin having sex.
- Limit sexual partners. The chances of getting infected with HIV and STDs increase with each sexual partner you have.
- Use a latex condom. Proper condom use helps protect you and your partner(s) from infection. If your partner refuses to wear a condom, you may want to not have sex.
- Avoid risky sex practices. The riskiest sex is vaginal or anal sex without a latex condom. Anal sex poses the most risk because it is more likely to tear or break the skin. This makes it easier for HIV to enter the bloodstream.
- Avoid sharing equipment for injection drugs.

#### **Confidentiality of Test Result**

**The test result will become a part of your confidential medical record. Only those individuals in the practice with a "need to know"--those directly involved in your care--will know your test results. Maine law specifies the confidential nature of the test results and provides that the result may be disclosed only upon your written authorization or when otherwise required by law. The fact that you received an HIV test**

**may be disclosed to your health insurance carrier in order to obtain payment, but the test results will not be disclosed to your health insurance carrier. Neither your employer nor your life or disability insurance carrier will have access to your test results without your specific written authorization. If you apply for workers' compensation benefits or life or disability insurance, however, you may be asked to disclose your HIV status during the application process.**

#### **Testing Alternative**

You have an alternative to testing by your health care provider. Maine has an anonymous HIV testing program in which the results would be released only to you. For more information, call 1-800-851-AIDS. You may want to consider this alternative if you have particular concerns about the confidentiality of your test results.

#### **Risks of HIV Testing**

There are few, if any, medical risks of HIV testing. Any such risks are greatly outweighed by the benefit to be gained through proper treatment if you test positive for HIV. However, a positive test result may have an impact on your emotions. Also, improper disclosure of a positive test result may result in discrimination, but state and federal laws attempt to minimize that potential.

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After discussing all of the above, my health care provider gave me an opportunity to ask questions and to seek further information about HIV and AIDS. I believe that I do not require further information at this time, and I am prepared to proceed with the recommended testing. I believe that my health care provider has honored my right to make my own informed health care decision. I give my consent voluntarily and freely, and certify that I can give valid consent. I understand that I can revoke this consent at any time up until the time that the test is performed. I authorize my health care provider to release to my insurance carrier the minimum amount of information about this testing to ensure payment.

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Patient's Printed Name

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Signature of Patient

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Date/Time

### **POST-TEST COUNSELING NOTES**

I verify that the laboratory I.D. number matches the I.D. number assigned a the pre-test visit: Yes/No

Test Result: Positive/Negative

Follow-up or referral:

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Signature of Health Care Provider

Date